



HEARD ACROSS MONTANA

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Legislative Audit Update

By Chris Christensen cchristensen@mt.gov

The State Legislative Audit Division has been conducting a performance audit on the Interoperability Montana (IM) Project. The audit team, consisting primarily of Angus Maciver and Will Soller, have asked and received much information and have interviewed many individuals involved in the project. Their report will focus on the following five areas:

1. Enabling legislation
2. Long-term planning
3. Long-term funding
4. State agency participation
5. Asset management

The audit team continues to welcome input from anybody involved in the project. Please contact them with questions or concerns. Will Soller may be contacted at 444-3232.

IM Technical Committee Five-Year Planning Session

By E. Wing Spooner espooner@mt.gov

The IM Technical Committee (IMTC) met in Billings on Tues., Oct. 21, to address the five-year build-out of the IM system. In a three-and-a-half-hour meeting, members identified all additional sites not previously documented, and clarified equipment needs for the sites. Phase 1 needs referred to infrastructure, Phase 2 needs represented microwave connectivity, and Phase 3 stood for trunking. IMTC Chair Bob McWilliams explained that the group was not addressing budget considerations or priorities at this particular meeting.

Representative from each consortium had the opportunity to list additional sites, explain communications equipment needs at those sites, and discuss strategic opportunities that various sites offer. Emphasis will be placed on creating redundant microwave rings rather than individual hot standby sites. Participants also identified the need for several microwave path studies and coverage maps.

Members were urged to make progress on permits, user agreements and easements. Progress on sites in the Big Sky 11 Consortium is critical because end dates exist for funding sources.

The next IMTC meeting will be Mon., Nov. 24, at the State Capitol in Helena beginning at 9:00 am.

Mutual Aid and Common Frequency Roundtable

By E. Wing Spooner espooner@mt.gov

Close to 35 participants attended a Mutual Aid and Common Frequency Roundtable session in Billings on Tues., Oct. 21. Scott Bradford, Public Safety Services Bureau (PSSB), chaired the meeting as a forum to exchange ideas and information about the mutual aid and common frequency system..

Dave McGinnis, Missoula Sheriff's Office, led a discussion on narrowbanding and potential impacts to the system. By January 1, 2013, the transition from wide-band to narrow-band has to be completed. It was clarified that narrow-banding applies to analog communications and does not mean P25. To make the transition seamless, it was suggested that Feb. 2012 be used as a deadline for changing mutual aid wide-band channels to narrow-band. This would allow 3½ years for PSSB to assist local jurisdictions to make the transition. All color channel mutual aid licenses are currently licensed for both wide- and narrow-band. Local jurisdiction license modification requests need to be submitted to the FCC to switch to narrow banding, and a reduced coordination fee is associated with the narrow-banding process.

Scott explained the history behind interference issues that are being experiencing between users and co-users. Flathead County representative Jack Spillman outlined examples of interference and potential solutions. It has been suggested that channel guards be added to the mutual aid frequencies for protection; however, consistency with agencies in neighboring states is a concern. PSSB was encouraged to use first-responder councils for input on how to solve these issues.

Discussion also took place about the possible misuse of mutual aid common frequencies. The consensus was that emphasis be placed on educating users and to work directly with mutual aid partners in the event of misuse. The group also discussed encryption issues and the possibility of allowing discipline-specific encryption on certain channels using statewide keys. Once again, input on this subject should be solicited from involved groups, including ambulance and hospital groups that were not able to be represented at the meeting.



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Plans are to update the Mutual Aid Manual within the next 18 months. Scott asked for feedback on what items work well and which ones don't. He envisions that the revision will include the IM Project Interop Channel Plan as well as NIMS language. Ideas and comments will be solicited from councils. Participants then explored the need for additional mutual aid channels and duplication of Gold Channel functionality.

Scott expressed his appreciation to all of the participants and emphasized his willingness to participate in council meetings.

Montana Chapter APCO Conference

By E. Wing Spooner espooner@mt.gov

The Montana Chapter of the Association of Public-Safety Communications Officials (APCO) held its annual conference in Billings Oct. 22 and 23. The conference began with a keynote presentation by Bill Carrow, 1st Vice President of the APCO International Board of Officers.

Montana APCO Public Safety Awards were presented as follows: Supervisor of the Year: Chuck Lee, Fallon County 9-1-1; Technician of the Year: Dorothy Gremaux, Lewistown Police Dept. Central Montana Dispatch Center 9-1-1 Coordinator; Trainer of the Year: Joan Farnstrom, Pondera County Dispatcher, and Telecommunicator of the Year: Amber Thompson, Liberty County Dispatcher.

The conference featured several good speakers who addressed such topics as Basic Incident Command, Homeland Security Incidents & Dispatch, and PSAPs. Dave McGinnis, Missoula Sheriff's Office, gave a presentation on Radio Systems Considerations, and covered such items as the importance of checking generators at remote communications sites on a regular basis, electrical considerations, RF conditioning, combiners, antenna software and tower do's and don'ts. Roger Smith and Dale Osborne, Montana Highway Patrol, gave an informative update on the IM Project and interoperability standards.

Many thanks go to the conference organizers for offering a great opportunity for recognition and public safety training.

Upcoming Meetings

Oct. 28

IM Governance Com. Sustainability Plan Work Session
Helena • 10:00 am - 5:00 pm
Dept. of Corrections

Oct. 29

IM Finance Committee Work Session
Helena • Noon – 5:00 pm
Anderson & Zurmuehlen • 828 Great Northern Blvd.

Oct. 30

Mobile Data Terminal Consortium
Bozeman • 10:00 am
Best Western City Center Motel, 507 W Main St.

Nov. 5 (Wed.)

IM Finance Committee
Helena • 9:00 am - Noon
Anderson & Zurmuehlen • 828 Great Northern Blvd.

Nov. 5 (Wed.)

IM Governance Committee
Helena • Noon - 5:00 pm
DOC Annex Conf. Rm.; Behind 515 N. Sanders St.

Nov. 6 (Thurs.)

IM Project Directors (IMPD) Meeting
Helena • 9:00 am - 3:00 pm
State Capitol, Room 152

Nov. 6 (Tentative)

Northern Tier Consortium (NTIC)
Havre • 9:00 am
Great Northern Inn, 1345 1st St.

Nov. 12

Central Consortium (CMICC)
Great Falls • 10:00 am
Wheat Building, 750 6th Street SW

Nov. 12

South Central Montana Consortium (SCMIC)
Bozeman • 10:00 am
Emergency Operations Center, 219 East Tamarack

Nov. 12

Eastern Tier Consortium
Glendive • 10:00 am - 12:00 noon
Law Enforcement Center, 440 Colorado Blvd.

Nov. 13

I-15/90 Corridor Consortium
Butte • 10:00 am
Chamber of Commerce; 1000 George St.